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What Are the Aims in Rural Living?[1]

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The topic, "What are the aims in rural living" does not tempt me to deliver an oration on country life. We want rather to review the larger problems which rural people now face, and to plead that these are the problems of all of us. We want to make clear what an aim is and that we ought to agree upon larger aims. Such aims should serve as great beacons to guide us in discovering and analyzing the important situations which press upon the majority of our country people. Then we can rebuild our programs, readjust our work to meet the greater needs. Just as the radio beams and beacons enable our aviators to make happy landings, so will right aims in rural living enable us to aid rural people to steer a straighter course to happier ports.

The report on extension work[2] compiled by the Office of Education, declares that "the objectives and programs of extension work do not adequately recognize that Smith-Lever extension includes not only vocational training but also important social and humanistic purposes. The fundamental purpose of extension education, namely, developing of rural people themselves, was stated as of first importance by only four institutions, as reported to the committee which made the study of the land-grant institutions."

Some progress has been made since 1930, when that report was issued. "But in order to come nearer to the underlying purpose, much, much more must be done in fostering attitudes of mind and capacities which will enable rural people better to meet the individual and civic problems which confront them." We need to point out the larger situations to rural people and to analyze them together. Extension workers do analyze the situations which may affect their own special fields. But that is not sufficient now. More ground must be covered, more factors considered, greater aims accepted.

We do not mean by "aims" some immediate goals or objectives. Rather an aim is a generalized statement indicating the direction which a life acti-

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1/ Presented at Regional Extension Conference of the Northeastern States, in Boston, Mass., February 19 to 21, 1936.

2/ Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, U. S. Office of Education, Bull. 1930, no. 9, v. 2, p. 435-574.

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vity should be taking.[3] Thus conserving health is an aim. An aim may include any number of objectives. Hot school lunches, the measurement of school children, or dental clinics may be objectives. Obviously, objectives should vary infinitely with different counties and even communities, depending upon the situation each presents. Unless the major aims are understood the objectives tend to become the same, county by county and State by State. Then we find stereotyped, patented projects. An aim is like a searchlight to help us pick out the specific situations affecting the conservation of health in this and that community, and forces us to find solutions for specific problems instead of borrowing projects or activities first designed to meet particular situations elsewhere.

If we accept health conservation as a major aim, then the specialists in child development, nutrition, clothing, recreation and sociology study the health situations in any given area with local leaders, local physicians, and health officials, isolate distinct problems, find solutions for these, and agree upon objectives and procedure. Similarly, efficient production is not a major aim, but "larger farm incomes" is. Efficient production is only one marker, one objective. With larger incomes as the aim, specialists, agents, and local leaders together study the income situations and influences. As the income needs become known in any one section or for a type of farming, fitting recommendations are found which may be quite different from previous ones. Concretely, a farmer here in the East may have sufficient pasture for the number of cattle which the amount of winter feed he can produce allows him to keep. The bigger problem as far as income needs is concerned is winter feed, not pasture improvement.

The industrial revolution and the depression brought great social and economic changes to the country. "Nor have the full effects yet been reached", says Dean W. F. Russell[4] "Important changes are still in the making. We are passing one of the great milestones of history. A society different from anything man has seen is developing. We are entering a new world."

You are witnessing, yes you are part of, an evolution in which far-reaching and new national policies in agriculture are originating. You know the steps which are being made in adjusting agriculture with the aid of State and national government agencies. The new agricultural bill may accelerate rational soil use to a degree never witnessed. You see a change in public policy from exploitation to conservation in resources. You see wide-flung measures to help the great masses. We have been forced to make violent ad-

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3/ C. L. Brownell. Basic principles used in the selection of objectives for physical education in the White House Conference Committee report. In American Child Health Association. Principles and practices in health education from the sixth Health Education Conference held at Sayville, Long Island, June 16-21, 1930, p. 79-83. New York. American Child Assoc., 1931.

4/ W. F. Russell. The Frontier Within, Journal of Adult Education. v.3, p. 283-289. June 1931.

justments in our thinking, our living. None of us can stay in some little sheltered bywater and see the main stream roar by. Times, things, situations, thinking are different on every farm and in every community. The tempo is faster there as it is in the city. Extension programs too must be adjusted to help rural people readjust themselves to the new and changing situations, or the people will pass us by and extension work will not be a dynamic force in rural affairs. That is unthinkable.

It may seem all right to say, man lives not by bread alone, but just now on farm after farm there isn't money enough to buy mother some longed for conveniences, father much needed "specs", and Johnny, Susie, and the rest the medical service, clothes, schooling, they need. Figures from 970 farms in the North Atlantic States show that the average cash income in 1934 was only $580.[5] Out of that came all house expenses, interest on debts, improvements, and compensation for father's and the family's labor on the farm. Nearly 38 percent of the farms show cash incomes running from nothing to $500, 11 percent report losses from 0 to $500 instead of income. Only 22 percent of the farms reporting showed net cash income of from $500 to $1,000. The farm seems to be a place too often which furnishes only room and board. What of education, life insurance, savings for old age, doctors, teeth, tonsils, glasses, reading, recreation?

Of course there are farms which make more than the amounts cited. But you cannot get away from these figures or those of similar studies. They show all too well a real situation which needs the help of all of us before it will be bettered. The job is one of understanding farm management and to help these people raise their incomes. Otherwise, we may be recommending new glasses for people whose real problem is something organic.

Let us look at the health situation. It is said, that one-half of the people who seek medical attention are suffering from no physical illness that medicine or surgery can help.[6] Our hospitals treat more people with mental ills than they treat patients with physical ills. The stresses and strains of life today are partly responsible for this situation, the worries of debt and low income, the lack of adjustment to life's realities, family and neighborhood squabbles, lack of knowledge of how our emotions may make or ruin us, children handicapped for all of life because of fears and complexes which had their origin in the way their parents and grandparents acted, lived, talked, punished, or rewarded. That is why all extension people should help the child-development work still so new, to be understood and coordinate their plans with this work. It is in the years of infancy and early childhood that most can be done in building attitudes, tastes, desires, and habits which are fundamental elements of character.

5/ Crops and Markets, v.12, p.270-301, July 1935. Income From Farm Production in the U. S., 1934, U. S. Dept. Agr.

6/ Thorndike, E. L., and Gates, A. J. Elementary Principles of Education, 355pp. New York, Macmillan Co., 1929.

The physical ills of rural people are great enough too. Injury and disease which might be curbed or prevented take a terrific toll and cut down the life span far below what it should be. There are no general hospitals in 1,300 counties of the United States; and nearly a third of the population lives in areas with less than two beds per thousand people and more than 50 miles from any important hospital center.7/ Only 540 counties have county health units of the kind described by Dr. Ziegler last year at our conference. In Rutherford County, Tenn., as one result of the work of a county health unit more than 3,000 children won a blue ribbon for personal health achievement. Carroll P. Streeter, field editor of the Farmer's Wife magazine asks in this same article I have just quoted from, "Why isn't providing health facilities as much a social enterprise as providing a good school or good roads, and why should not farmers cooperate to obtain community health services just as they long have cooperated in buying and selling other services?"

The situations affecting rural health which are still too common would include the following:

Bad housing.
Indifference to health habits.
Food poorly prepared, limited in choice, not giving protective elements.
No convenient water supply.
Insanitary disposal of waste.
Pests.
Communicable diseases.
Too much hard work.
Inaccessibility to medical and hospital aids.

I am not one of those who think that family life has gone entirely to the deuce. But there are few of our generation who are not aware of situations and conditions which are vastly different from those of the days when we were growing up. The home in many cases is not the center of life. For many, it is only a place to eat and sleep. Indeed Dean Merrill once said "Too much of extension work took people out of the home, got them to go places when the need was for something that would tend to get people to stay at home to live with the family." The family is shrinking. The woman has more freedom, and father doesn't occupy the position of patriarch any more. The youngsters' circle of acquaintances and range of interests have been widened immeasurably. Moreover, through the radio, picture show, "auto", and other things of this age, the world for rural boys and girls is more objective than it was for us. They have little patience with abstract things. They know more too than we did, and many a mother when she hears them talk and sees the things her children are doing is as distracted as the hen who sees her brood of ducklings cavort in a pond.

7/ Carroll P. Streeter. Reorganizing Rural Health Facilities, Rural America, v.14, p.3-6. January, 1936.

The depression has emphasized how poorly rural youth may be fitted for life. Many are often not prepared at all, or they are too specially fitted. Rapidly changing situations due to industrial and economic changes demand not the making of jacks of all trades, but preparation for more than one occupation. A tabulation of 448 boys recently assigned to jobs by the National Youth Administration in the New York area shows that nearly 50 percent have never worked before. Five percent had college degrees, 30 had attended college, and 80 had graduated from high schools. Twenty-eight were trained as typists, 24 as bookkeepers, 8 as accountants, 50 as economists, 40 as teachers, 22 as electricians, 10 as draftsmen, 26 as mechanics, and others had training in business law, painting, leather crafts, journalism, and research. When they sought work only 8 could find temporary jobs of a professional nature. Two were hired as teachers, 2 as musicians, 1 each as photographer, artist, designer, actor. Forty-seven found clerical places, 1 took a job on a farm, 48 got jobs as delivery men, 13 as truck helpers, 6 as waiters and bus boys, 24 as stock boys, 8 as packers, 5 as soda-fountain clerks, 30 as plumbers' assistants, 2 as porters, 4 as elevator operators, 2 as janitors, 1 as laborer, 1 as dishwasher.

Because of situations like this, a great many boys and girls return from the cities to the farms, and many there who normally would leave the farms for the cities are dammed up because of lack of opportunity or lack of knowledge and training to meet existing opportunities. Because of the increase in consolidated schools, it may be that we see the whole picture of rural education somewhat rosier than it actually is. Someone has said that there are still twelve million children in one-room schools. Murl McDonald, assistant director of extension in Iowa, said recently "Not long since one of our brilliant candidates for high State office campaigned on the little red schoolhouse wooden-bench issue as a bid for rural support, making us forget how little it was and that the red had long since become a faded, muckled, grayish brown with the same old one-teacher attack on all eight grades of elementary instruction. The rural community is still prone to count tax reduction in terms of how much has been saved in the schools."[8/]

Others have pointed out much better than I can that our rural government is an heirloom of other days, and that it is not geared to the faster tempo of our conditions of today, to the great changes which have occurred. There are many writers who say this or that is affecting our democratic form of government for the worse. The schools are commencing to realize that the teaching of civics has been a perfunctory proposition which has helped little toward a better understanding of government, and the part citizens should play in its maintenance. Some of the studies of town and county governments which have been made by some of our State colleges show economic waste that is startling. In some areas, problems of taxes, government services, and public cost are very closely tied up with the problem of land settlement and land use.

The situation of the rural church, I am afraid, has not been bettered in any considerable degree. The same old problems of small congregations, too

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8/ 1935 Iowa Farm Family Living Outlook Conference. Iowa State Col. Ext. E H 35, 3 pp. [1935] Mimeographed.

many small churches, poor attendance, underpaid ministers who are making heroic sacrifices, the lack of contact of the church with everyday affairs, still exist. The need for maintaining superior moral environment for rural youth and the need for fostering religious and related ethical training are still among the greatest needs of the open country. All too few churches are the community centers that they once were, and which they still should be.

More leisure has come to the country, more opportunity for recreational activity. In some areas, the clubs and associations now organized for athletics, music, and social companionship are numerous enough to compete with extension for the participation of rural people. Auto, radio, motion picture, theaters, transport families to far-distant places and events. If we think of recreation, however, as something which should be more than entertainment, something which should contribute to the education of the individual, to spiritual growth, and to enrichment of what we call folk life, then we may question whether after all recreation has advanced much. The old problem of lifting the recreational life of rural people, as of city people, is still with us. In some ways it is greater than in earlier days because so much dependence is placed upon commercialized entertainment, or recreation which yields its pleasures vicariously.

These situations so briefly reviewed are the major situations in rural life. They are not new to you. New only is the thought that these situations shape our aims and our projects. What shall be our aims to meet these situations?

(1) First of all, we should aim to raise farm incomes generally, and above all to lift vast numbers of rural people above the near-poverty level on which they now exist. There are two approaches.

a. Nationally through the national policy and developed procedure to balance agriculture.

b. Locally by studying farm incomes, farm-organization and farm-management factors, and economic situations, and by using the income approach in making extension programs. Where farm incomes are so low as study after study shows, we cannot help this situation by stressing only efficiency of production or housekeeping skills. The survey of the extension work of our land-grant colleges made under the direction of the Office of Education, showed that "Programs of work consist often of a large number of projects hastily chosen and thrown together in a paper outline of activities. Projects should be fewer in number and the elements of each thoroughly analyzed."

When we know the income ranges in the various types of farms and how these are earned, when we analyze how a recommendation affects income, then objectives will change, will be part of a coordinated concentrated attack on income problems. The part-time farmer and the commercial dairy farmer alike face income problems which seem to call for much more than seed trials, purebred sires, or information on producing

high-quality eggs. The great majority of farm women with the pitifully few dollars scraped from here and wrung from there, surely need far more now than style and color information. How can we together help our farmers in adding one - two - three hundred dollars to the income?

(2) The aim should be to improve rural-health situations by means of dynamic programs drawn to meet specific local needs. Such programs will help in meeting the mental, social, emotional as well as physical phases of healthful living. They will aid rural people in detecting health situations and in furnishing health protection. They will foster activities which will aid children to form standards for healthful living, social relationships, and emotional control.[9] Again it is required that various specialists coordinate their effort and work with local leaders and professional groups, in analyzing situations and developing recommendations. Specialists in clothing, child development, sociology, nutrition, recreation, engineering, dairying, poultry, horticulture need to make new clinical studies together and build a common program which will carry the needed educational work and seek to do the organization and fund-raising work necessary to establishing medical and health-care services.

(3) The rural home must recapture the values which may be found in a planned family and home life. This means not merely reviving old standards, but teaching the significance of the changed social situations and developing objective not abstract measures and readjustments. Involved are cooperation with the schools, and coordination of study and planning of all specialists in home economics as well as sociologists, recreation specialists, and even some specialists in the agricultural field.

(4) Rural living must make larger provision for education. Closer contacts of extension and local leaders with the schools is needed that greater versatility of training may be given. Club projects, school curricula, and college courses must recognize increasingly the needs of rural boys and girls. Nor are vocational guidance and training sufficient. More training in the fields described here under aims is required if appreciations and insights are to be raised to a higher plane. Needed work with older boys and girls now being studied seems to offer greater opportunities than merely adding larger home and farm club projects, or social and study clubs to our programs. We need to know more about the number, situation, and needs of the older boys and girls before we can make the most helpful programs, and it is noteworthy that club leaders, extension agents, and specialists have commenced to make the necessary studies. The cooperation of our specialists in nearly every field is much desired.

(5) John Dewey and many of his followers place education for civic efficiency as one of the major aims of education. The handicaps which have prevented attaining that ideal plane of democracy held before us by the founders

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9/ American Child Health Association. Principles and practices in health education from the sixth Health Education Conference held at Sayville, Long Island, June, 16-21, 1930.. 485 pp. New York, American Child Assoc. 1931.

of America may be removed gradually by education.[10] Therefore, rural leaders, extension workers and our schools should join in studying the needs of rural government and management of county and community affairs. The field would seem to be an attractive one for some of our 4-H club members. And now with the growing interest in discussion groups, the problems of rural government should yield many fine chances for exploratory excursions.

(6) The broad program for the development of better living in the country cannot omit the church and ethical culture. The field may seem a difficult one to enter for extension workers. But what agency may serve better to help revivify the rural church and make it a livelier force in rural thinking and rural affairs? Some gains have been made. More can be made when the church in the open country is made a community center, sharing with the school greater influence in the everyday life of the people. We might start with the church grounds, and some of the Godforsaken rural cemeteries. Then we might gradually add paint and also recreation and meeting conveniences.

(7) I believe with the educators that recreation must be a larger aim in improving rural life. More will believe this and more will be done in developing family and community recreational opportunities, if, as, and when the concept of what real recreation should be grows in the mind and plans of our local leaders and extension workers. I believe recreation should be a major aim which should influence the shaping of extension programs. We need to study, more fully, however, local and State needs before offering too many entertainment things.

What shall we do? Will the directors encourage their staffs to study situations first and the larger aims, that objectives and programs more appropriate to the needs may be developed? Shall groups of specialists study specific types of farming or living conditions, and find the real income and living problems? Can the dairy specialist, agronomist, farm-management and marketing specialists develop a more rational program to reach business and income problems as well as production? Can the home demonstration specialists join in a coordinated attack on health, income, recreation, family life, and community problems as these may be found under the light of the larger aims? Must we not decrease the number of highly specialized activities, many of which make but little contribution to solving the greater problems of rural living? With only two or three county extension agents in a county, must we not concentrate on fewer and larger activities if we really wish to affect rural living?

Yes - is the answer to all of these questions. Directors and specialists are already moving in these directions. The opportunities for extension work are greater than they ever were. There are many who see these and who are preparing to meet them.

10/ Thorndike, E. L., and Gates, A. I. Elementary Principles of Education. 355 pp. New York, Macmillan Co., 1929.

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